



TONY HAWK INTERVIEW  
PORTIONS USED IN: *THE THREAD SEASON ONE*

**Tony Hawk, Skater**  
**August 31, 2023**  
**Interviewed by Ari Fishman**  
**Total Running Time: 1 hour, 4 minutes and 39 seconds**

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Tony Hawk  
Skater

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Life Stories  
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**Tony Hawk**

**Skater**

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TONY HAWK:

Hey, I'm Tony Hawk, professional skateboarder, and this is my life story. I'm also known as Tony Hawk's Pro Skater or that's a video game, but I'm not. I'm. I am Tony Hawk's Pro Skater. It gets confusing.



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ARI FISHMAN:

I really do want to start with you. Kind of tell me how you define skateboarding culture in relation to popular culture and how that influenced, you know, the landscape.

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TONY HAWK:

Well, I would say at its most basic, skateboarding is a an art form, a lifestyle and a sport. And depending on what interests you in all of those elements is, is what you'll lean into. Many people don't like the idea that it's a sport because they got into it because they didn't they didn't like competitive sports. They didn't like team sports even. And they found a community. And this this way of being active that was more artistic, but not about being compared to others. So I understand that. On the other end of that, it is a sport. It's in the Olympics. We you know, when I started competing, I was I was first recognized as a skater with skills because I was competing. So that element exists, too. And it's it's valid. But so much has come from skateboarding in terms of the culture because it required a very unique perspective to start skating. In the early days, it wasn't tried and true, it wasn't popular. It set you apart from anyone your age because it wasn't cool. And so if you chose to be a skater, you had to do it with confidence. You had to do it truly because you loved it, not because you were trying to fit in. No one fit. We skated because we didn't fit in. We were the misfits. And so we found a sense of togetherness in our outcasts, in our outcast element, and through that. There's all kinds of of other there are there were a lot of other influences



that were happening with skateboarding because of that element. Because. We were not mainstream. We weren't listening to the radio. You know, I'm old, so radio was a thing. But we weren't we weren't listening to the mainstream music in what was popular. We were, if nothing else, creating it, creating our own sound, because there was a sound that was very much parallel to what we were doing in terms of the attitude, the aggression, the the I don't want to say anti-authority, but but definitely the the anti status quo. And so you had to there was a soundtrack that went to that. There was a fashion that was functional, but also offbeat. I mean, if you look at through the years, especially when skating was not popular, you could pick out a skater in the crowd just by what they were wearing because often, one, their shoes are all scuffed up on the side from doing all these and kick flips. But also there was just more of a. There was an edge. But it was. But it was. It was cool. Like, I don't know how to. It's something I can't really quantify, but I recognize it and a way of carrying yourself where it's like, I don't care about fitting in. I want to do this because I love it and what it brings to me, what it brings to my sense of self and confidence and. And what it brings to me mentally. I mean, that's why I chose skateboarding. I finally found something that. That spoke to me that that I felt a sense of accomplishment with and that I could do at my own pace, in my own style, and not have to listen to a coach. But still have a sense of community that was supportive.

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ARI FISHMAN:



How did it affect your mental growth and your personal growth and even your physical growth in that same way that skating affected the rest of the culture?

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TONY HAWK:

I was very young when I started skating. I was very small, very skinny. I got made fun of a lot. And I mean, I was bullied endlessly in school because I was so small. So I look like I was two grades behind the actual grade I was in. And I tried to play sports, but I didn't really fit in. I did okay. Like I did okay in basketball. I did okay in baseball. I never felt like I was truly progressing at those sports. I just did them because we were sort of expected to. When I found skating, every time I skated, I learned something new. And these are sometimes just minimal techniques, but I felt like I was always on this path of progression and I loved it. And so through that, I got stronger and eventually got taller. And then these big balls were no longer so intimidating. And it was like because I just stayed the course, I was able to benefit from all of that and benefit from all these skills. I was developing at an early age, way below the top of the pool. We didn't have ramps like that, so we had swimming pools. So I'm developing all these little tricks below the below the coping. And then all of a sudden I had strength, I had confidence, I had power, and I could do that stuff in the air and. The sense of validation that gave me was something that is like, I can't I can't even explain to people because. I didn't get validation elsewhere. I didn't get it from. From a team. I didn't get it from a from a league I didn't get it from. From a crowd. I got it from within.



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ARI FISHMAN:

And how much do you think of sort of at that time your progression was from just like grinding and being determined and like, going for it and how much was just like natural ability? Like, you just had this.

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TONY HAWK:

I can't there's no way anyone in those in that era of early skating, early 80s would say I had natural ability. I promise you that. It's written in print in Thrasher magazine. You know, just saying he looks like I think the quote was he looks like a mosquito flying around trying to land on something. I don't think that was the best compliment. And it sucks because, like, that's the Bible of skateboarding. That's where you're trying to find some sense of validation. And they're they're insulting my style and my skating even when I would do well. Do you know what I mean? Like how how that was really hard to deal with. But at the same time, it kind of fueled me to prove them wrong on some level. But also it was absolutely my commitment to getting better and putting in the work. I mean, that's there's. There's no overstating how important the time is, the time you put into it. And I was willing to be at the skatepark from the time school got out till the time they closed. Not willing to. I wanted to. I would put my my because I when I grew up in skate parks, street skating was not a thing. I know it's hard to like it's hard to give that kind of perspective to people these days because it's getting everywhere. There are skateparks everywhere. There was one skate park in our town. You had to pay to use it. You had to wear full pads. So I would leave school, get



picked up by my mom or dad, and then put my pads on in the car because I was not going to waste an ounce of time with checking in or putting my pads on once I got to the park. Mm hmm.

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ARI FISHMAN:

So, I mean, there are other kids that were probably grinding equally as hard as you. Sure. Close. But didn't become Tony Hawk. How do you think what do you think the difference was in those?

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TONY HAWK:

I can only. The only difference I can find with my peers at the time and why I was able to succeed further is because I never rested on my accolades. I always wanted to keep getting better. So even even when I was competing and doing well in competition, that wasn't the point. The point was to keep evolving and keep getting better at what I was doing, keep honing my craft. To this day, you know, I'm 45 years in and I'm going to go from here. I'm going to my ramp to trying to trick. That's my life.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Can you just walk us through the chronology of skateboarding?

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TONY HAWK:



The origins of skateboarding are murky, but for the most part, it was kids that were looking for another activity, like roller skating. Roller skating was the thing. So they dismantled roller skates, took the trucks and wheels off of roller skates and nailed them to a two by four. That's sort of the the accepted folklore of how skateboarding started. Not long after that, a bunch of surfers in Southern California started to emulate surfing on the sidewalk and then started to shape the the wood and the boards, kind of like mini surfboards and eventually learned that steel and clay is not the best material for wheels. So then urethane came into the scene and that changed it radically because you could skate on a lot more services. There's a there's a few different elements that happen, but there was a big drought in California in the late 70s. And people had to empty their swimming pools. And then the surfers figured out that the pools look like waves and they could ride the pools like waves. That is the birth of vert skateboarding in happened in pools. So then as skateboarding started to become a little more popular, in those days, skate parks were emulating empty swimming pools. So if you looked at the landscape of the late 70s, early 80s and the skate parks, it was all empty swimming pools or versions of empty swimming pools. And that's that's when I got into it. So that was the cool form of skateboarding. Then there was another form of skateboarding called freestyle, which was basically just flat ground. And it's not what people think of as flatland these days. No one knew how to do a kickflip. No one knew how to do an alley. So you were literally just sort of dancing around like you're ice skating, spinning three sixes, doing pirouettes, doing handstands. I appreciated all that. But in my eyes, that wasn't the cool way. A skate. I wanted to fly. So I chose to skate pools. That's your, like, history of why I skate vert or what vert is. Fast forward to the mid



80s. Mid to late 80s. Skateboarding was on the rise. Some people were building backyard ramps. There was a little bit of street skating happening and suddenly all the parks started closing because they couldn't afford the insurance. So then skateboarding went underground and people took to the streets. And that was the true birth of what we consider street skating, because there were no parks to go to. There were no facilities assigned for skateboarding. And there was a whole crew that figured out how to use stairs, how to use handrails, how to use benches and emulate what we had been doing all this time. A board slide was first done in pool. They figured out how to do a board slide on a handrail, and that was that's when everything changed. That was sort of the tipping point for. Skateboarding. Having all these other disciplines. So street skating went through this, this big evolution in the early 90s. In the mid-nineties, it started to come back on the radar through I mean, like, you know, it was it was featured in Back to the Future. Skateboarding was suddenly it was it was on MTV and ESPN did the first X Games which featured skateboarding. And I think that through the years of 95 to. 2000 was when there was an upswing in popularity and our video game was released in 1999 and definitely had a big impact on the recognition of skating and the awareness of it and the interest in it, and not just from a skaters perspective, but from a from a fan base. And I think that that was what changed the culture completely because suddenly people knew skate terminology. They knew the music, the culture, the fashion, the names, and maybe didn't even skate themselves but appreciated all of that. And that's when skateboarding sort of set a foundation for itself that it's here to stay. And and honest. And it's gone through maybe small waves of popularity since then. Since like 2000, 2001. But it's been here to stay ever since.





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ARI FISHMAN:

Was there a moment that triggered you to be like, That's what I want to do?  
Or, you know, I remember seeing Oh.

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TONY HAWK:

Yeah, I went to the very first time I went to a skate park. I had got it. I had a skateboard. I learned to ride through my neighborhood as transportation. 1977 78. And then in when I was ten years old, in 1978, I went to the skate park for the first time and I saw people flying. And and that was the moment I was like, I want to I want to fly. I want to do whatever it takes to get to that. I want to do that, and I'm here for it. And not long after that, I quit Little League. I no longer signed up for basketball, and I spent every moment I could outside of school at that skate park.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Was there a specific person or people that you kind of like? I know Bones Brigade was kind of like during the time.

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TONY HAWK:

I would think that probably one of my early inspirations was Steve Caballero, because he was he was small, he was older than me, but he was my size. And I



saw a photo of him in a magazine and he was wearing elbow pads on his knees. And I, I identify with that because I had the same issue that I couldn't find an iPad small enough, so I had to wear elbow pads. And he was flying out of a pool. He was he lived in Northern California. He was at a skate park called Winchester. And he's blasting this area. And the photo was seared into my memory. And I thought not not thought like, I can do that thought. I want to do that. You know what? It wasn't it wasn't something where it was like a competitive nature. It was more like he's smaller, he can fly. Maybe I can fly, too. And it kept me fired up.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Can you talk about your mindset when it came to like, failure, discipline, determination and especially like embracing pain in that discipline?

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TONY HAWK:

Well, I was always very determined, even when I wasn't skating. I think that was my my mom's version of saying he's very difficult. She just that was very determined. That was her nice way of saying it. And I channeled all that determination into my skating. So when I set out to learn a trick, I would obsess on it. I mean, it was it was truly obsessive. And, you know, I would make small adjustments along the way and eventually I would figure it out. Sometimes it didn't happen all at once. Sometimes I had to come back to it or I figured out a different technique that I could that I can interpret or sort of add to what I was trying to do. And for the most part, I figured out all these



things that that I had dreamed of and. But it was. It was just. It was more about the repetition and it was more about the not giving up. I mean, I did get hurt along the way, and probably there was a moment where I got hurt. I got a pretty bad injury early on and knocked my teeth out. I got a concussion and. It didn't deter me at all. I mean, I remember I remember being in the hospital and thinking, Oh, I know I did what I did wrong, and I got to adjust my feet and figure that out. I don't think that's the usual line of thinking for a 10 or 11 year old that's in the hospital. But. I was I was obsessed. And and I was willing to push through the pain. I was I was absolutely I don't want to get hurt, but I'm willing to get hurt.

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ARI FISHMAN:

I imagine fear plays a lot of part, or at least early on played a lot in what you were doing and how did you work through that?

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TONY HAWK:

Sure. Well, fear is a big aspect in skateboarding. How I overcame it was through confidence. And I never I never set out to do something that seemed intimidating or scary with with an attitude that I hope this works. Or what if this happens? My attitude was always, I have the skills and the pieces to this puzzle and I can I can put it together and I can figure it out. And that it's always been my approach. If you if you approach something with a worst case scenario in your head, that's what's going to happen. You're not going to luck into a landing. You have to tell yourself it's possible and tell yourself you're



capable of doing it. And that's usually what's going to happen. It's going to be a lot of work. It's not going to happen all at once, but you'll get there.

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ARI FISHMAN:

And and do you envision that trick landing? Like I said, like I've watched a lot of video of you like, doing the repetitions. And it seems like you really focus on what this is supposed to look like, the end result. Is that kind of what's going through your mind or.

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TONY HAWK:

Yeah. What's going through my mind is there's a lot. There's a lot of there's a lot of voices and a lot of what's wrong with you Voices. But I've always imagined, or I always I always project the. The completion, the success and. Almost to a point where. For instance, I was I was trying to track just two days ago, and my exhaustion level was so much that when I finally did it, I wasn't even celebrating. It was more like I just had this closure and it had to be done and. It's not the best. Attitude. But that's what keeps me going. Yeah, I mean, it's not, you know, it's not that it even isn't even acute. You're so exhausted that it's like, please just get this done. So I have to walk up these stairs again and, you know, go through this anymore. At the same time, there are other tricks or techniques where I've dreamt about it. I've. I've imagined it, I projected it. And when I do it, it it brings me the absolute most. I don't want to say joy in my life, but it gives me the most satisfaction in terms of. In



terms of visualizing and performing what I think I'm capable of. It's the feeling I've been chasing ever since I started skating. That's never changed.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Yet. I'm just curious, like when you have that, what's wrong with you voice in your head? Do you think that comes from the criticism you got like through your career or people like always underestimating you? Or do you think it comes from something really early on or at.

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TONY HAWK:

This point it just comes with. It's just a general frustration. You know, the voices in my head that there are voices in my head saying, you cannot do this. The voices in my head are saying, why haven't you met yet? So there's some motivation there. But to be honest, new skating tricks, especially now when you're talking about board manipulation and things, they're so highly technical that I could have the same exact approach to a trick every single time. And one will work. And I can't explain to you why that one worked. Finally everything came together. And the frustrating part about that is it's not like you've developed a new technique for yourself. It's not like I can build on that and say, okay, now I have this chick in my pocket. I'm going to do it elsewhere. It's like, I hope I got on video, right? You know? But that's not just the core of skating. The core of skating is building foundational tricks that you can do that you enjoy. And I have those from decades of skating.



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ARI FISHMAN:

And how many how many tricks do you think you've invented, like in your career that are just, like, unique to you?

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TONY HAWK:

I've invented a lot of tricks, but they're mostly combos of existing tricks. So over 100 for sure. But if I went down the list, they would just all sound so obscure and sort of. They would sound obscure and and things that not a lot of people would be interested in performing, you know, or emulating. But I guess I have been known for some other iconic tricks, stuff like stale fish Grab Madonna seven 2900, all the 540, stuff like that.

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ARI FISHMAN:

And is there one specific trick that's kind of like your reset where it's like, I just got to do this trick because I know it. You know, it's like.

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TONY HAWK:

I can do Madonna anywhere, anytime. I like the way it looks like the way it feels. And sometimes if the if the ramp or the ball is not designed well or isn't allowing me to do any aerial tricks, I can do that one in the air for some reason and just have this sort of muscle memory of exactly how it will work and where I can land.



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ARI FISHMAN:

You talked about a little bit, but just like your relationship with Thrasher magazine. They obviously have like a big part in like this resurgence. You got named skater of the year in the first person person. And so maybe it's talk about like your relationship with them and like it was like ups and downs.

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TONY HAWK:

I'm sure. Well there was skateboarding as there's some strange irony, but skateboarding, as small as it was in the early 80s, was very divided. There was a sort of camp that said, Oh, it's all about style. And then there was another camp that said, It's all about tricks. And I. I was all about doing tricks. I loved all of skateboarding. But it was weird to be sort of segregated when we have this small community as it is. How can we be at war? And then I'm not even considered that cool. So I'm like an outcast in this outcast activity. And that was very isolating. And so when I would read criticisms in places like Thrasher magazine, that definitely was not on my side. I was not a fan because I was all about tricks and they loved Christopher. So he was all flare and all style and all in big ears. And I love Christian, too. I just couldn't skate like him. And so they would bash me in the magazine and. It was it was hard to accept. But at the same time, it just it just made me want to try harder. So. You know, I guess the silver lining was that it motivated me and it motivated me to be more well-rounded in my style. But I can't recommend that as a



motivator to most people. Mm hmm. You know, criticism like hard criticism in print. It's not cool.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Especially when you're that young.

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TONY HAWK:

Yeah, when you're that young. I mean, you know. When people talk about online bullying, I was buoyed face to face.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Just skateboarding as a lifestyle. You know, it transcends just the sport itself. So maybe we could talk about like your, you know, your relationship to other people, how it like kind of was your whole life. Yeah.

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TONY HAWK:

Well, I think that when when you enter skateboarding and you and you choose that as your main activity or your main culture or lifestyle, it tends to permeate every aspect of your life in terms of your approach, in terms of your sense of values and sensibilities and who you hang out with. And so, yeah, I mean, skateboarding is kind of all consuming. It's very rare that someone is a hobbyist skateboarder and then has a regular 9 to 5 or whatever it is, you





know what I mean? That's not the usual. Even if they do have a 9 to 5, they're spending every hour outside of that. In and around skateboarding. Mm hmm. And we have our own language, and we have we have a sense of understanding that you've got to break the rules a little bit to succeed. You got to have the fences.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Skateboarding was about, like, breaking the rules and reinventing like another reality. Essentially.

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TONY HAWK:

I mean, skateboarding skateboarders see the city landscape in a whole different way. And thanks to the success of our video games, a lot of video gamers seem that way, too. But, you know, you see things more in terms of banks and ledges and runways and landing areas and and crowd issues. And it's just a different it you know, it's like you you take the scape hill and suddenly you change your whole vision of what everything is.

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ARI FISHMAN:

It's like kind of reinventing, like what everybody thinks is the norm.

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TONY HAWK:



I think so. And it also just helped me realize that I can approach my adult life and my being. I can I can approach adult life. Being a parent, having other obligations and other careers in ways that most people don't, because I learned that I could be successful at skateboarding, which was the most unlikely path to success at when I was a kid, no one was rich or famous from skateboarding. No one. The best skateboarders in the world had to find jobs when they turned 18. And as I progressed through it, I realized that I had a career and that I can chase other opportunities because of my success at skateboarding, but ones that fit within the skateboarding framework. Mm hmm. And. I love it. I mean, I just, you know, I feel. It's like I became autonomous where I can do all these other things as long as I'm willing to put in the work for them and still skate at my leisure and still. Still do for a living. I mean, I'm 55 and I'm a professional skateboarder. Like, it's wild. I didn't think I'd be able to be a pro skater. Is 20.

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ARI FISHMAN:

We talked about little bit earlier, but like punk music kind of went through skating and fashion to certain sense when through skating. And there was like sort of the hardcore punks that really lived that lifestyle. I assume, like you identify as a punk at that age and, you know, you didn't have like the shaved head or anything, but you were like kind of proving yourself through your, like, talents. And I wonder if you just talked to, like, the the punk culture and.

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TONY HAWK:

Well, I think skateboarding is skateboarding at its core is DIY. Do it yourself, do it however you want. Do it in your own, in your own style, in your own way, in your own voice. And. Skaters that that play music or enjoy music, they tend to to gravitate towards that type of music. It's do it yourself. That is the essence of punk rock. Pick up a guitar and start plants. Sing about your life. Whatever it is, if it's off key, if it's if it's whatever, we'll still enjoy it because there's passion behind it and it's energetic. And it became the soundtrack to skateboarding, really in the early, early days. I remember going to the skate park, you know, they had intercom systems for skate parks because you would have to you would skate for a certain amount of time, like you had to buy a two hour pass or whatever. So they're calling out, you know, Santa is going to come in or whatever. And then when they're not speaking on the intercoms, it was punk music. So the first time I ever heard Sex Pistols, Dead Kennedys, Black Flag, Bad Brains, Adolescence Descendants, Circle Jerks, that was all in the skate park. And. It. It fueled our energy. You know what I mean? It was like, what's this weird music? It was like, Oh, yeah, I get this. This is exactly the soundtrack to what I do. And it's shaped so much of. Of our culture and especially my life and my direction. And then when I was able to work on a video game, I wanted to share that soundtrack. And little did I know that would become one of the biggest facets of our video game series that people love the music news like it's just the music I heard at the park.

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ARI FISHMAN:



I really like the story. Maybe could just tell the story quickly as one of the competitions you just felt so comfortable, like in the zone that you're actually singing along to the song. Like, Oh.

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TONY HAWK:

Yeah, well, I would when I would compete, I would obsess on my routine to the point where it became boring for me. And when it became boring, I knew that I was in good shape because then I would just be able to do it in a in a competition run. And then I chose one of my favorite songs to skate to at this one event. Toy Dolls. She goes to finals, and I was singing along to the song doing my Run. I mean, that's how dialed in I was. I mean, you know, they call it the Zone or whatever. I was in the zone.

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ARI FISHMAN:

And do you ever reach that point when you're like skating or skating competition where you're not even thinking about what you're doing? Like, it's just kind of coming naturally to you?

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TONY HAWK:

Yeah, in in my earlier days, during my peak days. And nowadays I'm much more a much more aware of the of the risks and the and that my body is not going to react as quickly as it used to. So that has shifted. But back in the day, for sure, I was just a lot of it came easy, but it only came easy. It only came



easy because I was so disciplined with working on it ahead of time. Like I think that's the mistake people think, Is that what came easy? Because you just had this natural talent? I didn't. I worked at it and I worked at it so hard that it became mundane and easy. But still fun.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Scenes were very popular in terms of punk shows and competitions, that sort of thing.

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TONY HAWK:

Well, like I said, skateboarding has been such a do yourself sport that when there were no magazines before the days of Thrasher and Transworld Magazine or before the days of Thrasher, skateboarder or a trans will skateboarding, local scenes or local skaters would just make their own zine. And it was a it was a Xerox copy with, you know, black and white photos and articles about whatever was going on in that town. And there was a network of zines. So people would get mailing addresses and they would send their zines to Virginia and and then the Virginia guys would send their zines to Texas and we would get them in California. And it was just sort of this network of of skate mini skate magazines. And we loved it. And I mean, people like famously one of the guys that one guy had a magazine Escape Fate. He became the editor of one of the biggest magazines at the time. Another guy had. Oh, man, I can't remember the name. Anyway, he had this legendary zine in the Midwest and it was really kind of edgy, but super funny.



He became the editor of Big Brother magazine. Mm hmm. Which went on to create Jackass. So there's your, you know, like that's the spark was was a guy doing a super funny skate zine, became the editor of a legitimate skate magazine and was one of the founders of Jackass.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Wow. Talk about the video camera coming to play in VCRs and households kind of coming into play.

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TONY HAWK:

Well, we we grew up in that era. The first era of home video. So. Before. Like in the early, early days, especially my early days of skating. No one had a camera. No one had it. You know, only news. Only news stations had video cameras and they would come maybe cover an event and that was it. And then slowly people started to get VCRs home, video cameras. And then when the home video camera became affordable, suddenly videos were all over the place and people were making their own skate videos of their local scenes. Companies were making cohesive skate videos of their whole team. I was in the Bonds brigade, so I was in the Bundesliga videos. They were one of the first ones ever. And. That changed the landscape in terms of. Showing or showing skating and skaters in their more natural form instead of just in competition, because competition is as great as it was. It's a conservative form of skating. It's you're doing you're doing stuff that you know you're going to make. Videos allowed us to try stuff over and over until we got it.



And so that was a different level of skating and a different a different way to show it. I was thankful because I was mostly about doing tricks. And then suddenly I had a venue and I had a way to capture these tricks because some of the checks were too hard to do in competition. They're too risky. And I think that was probably one of the my biggest boosts in terms of recognition was being in those videos.

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ARI FISHMAN:

You've said this, but skating brings like a community together. It also develops a need for individual expression. So it's like a group, you know, it's unity in diversity. You basically.

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TONY HAWK:

I think skateboarding is the great equalizer. I think it's it's one of the most inclusive activities or sports around. And you can tell by the if you go to a skate park right now, there's all people from all walks of life, all ages, all races, genders, and they're all doing it together. And a lot of times you'll see someone trying to learn something new and everyone else that's there, regardless of if they know that person or not, will rally around them. And they want to see them succeed. And, you know, you see it. You see a kid like learning a job. And for the first time, everyone's like, you got to go lean forward. Here we go. And they drop in and there's just this uproar and I can't think of any other sport like that. It's not happening on the basketball courts. It's not happening on soccer fields. I appreciate all other sports. I appreciate



teamwork. I appreciate the discipline it takes to get good at that. But I can't think of another sport that has that sense of community.

00:35:45:00

ARI FISHMAN:

We talked about this a little bit, but just like skateboarding and pop culture, like *Back to the Future*, like *Gleaming the Cube*, like all those movies kind of came out around then and how that influence was on skateboarding.

00:35:55:00

TONY HAWK:

Yeah, through through skateboarding history, you can point to specific times, influences, even films that sparked an interest. And in the mid-eighties *Back to the Future* was a big boost for skateboarding because Michael J. Fox they had scooters in the I guess it was the 50s 60s. And then he he came from the 80s where skateboarding was already he came from the 80s where skateboarding was already established, went back in time, you know, created the first skateboard by ripping off the the handlebars. And once he started skating, they had stunt doubles. Obviously modern skateboarders pair Wilander Bob Schmelzer I know everyone who was in the movie, obviously, and they were doing more modern skating and kids saw that and didn't realize that skateboarding was that or that you could do these things. And immediately there was a huge rise in interest in skateboarding. Same thing happened with a few years later. *Gleam in the Cube* was a movie that I was in. You know, the main skater was I'm sorry, the main character was a hardcore skater. He actually kind of solves a murder mystery with his skate skills. You





know, it's a little out there, but I was stoked to be in it. And a lot of people saw that movie and they they really enjoyed the skate scenes in it. And then fast forward to 1995, people seeing X-Games, people seeing what skateboarding had become, the evolution of it. People, you know, flying, doing big stunts, kit flips, handrails. And then that that kind of sparked a resurgence or a video game. When people embraced the game, the gameplay, they started to understand the mechanics of skateboarding tricks. They appreciated the the culture, the music, the skaters themselves, the. The. The iconic looks. And, you know, I would say that anyone that is skateboarding now that's been doing it for a while can almost point to one of those events to say that's that's what got me into it or that's what fired me up to get better at it.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Like around that time. Also, your career is really taking off. But you're feeling a lot of alienation from like the kids in your school and also some of the kids like in the skate scene, like you're kind of getting it from different angles. Can you just talk about that and how that kind of motivated you?

00:38:38:00

TONY HAWK:

Yeah. So when I really got into skating and I was starting to do well in competition and starting to sort of rise through the ranks, I wasn't well-liked by the skate community because my style was so trick based. They called me a circus freak, which I embrace now. But back then I didn't feel like a compliment. And my my actual classmates, like people I grew up with, none



of them skated anymore. Skating went through a little phase of popularity, and then it was gone. It was like. It was like. And it was more like we were into the yo yo, or we were into Pogs, and then everyone grew out of it. But I didn't. And I just kept skating. So when I would come to school with a skateboard, they were like, You still skate like. Are you too old? I was all but 14. And then as that as I got even better at it, the. Nothing changed at school. In fact, I used to like when I first when I in my first year of ninth grade as a freshman, I used to hide my skateboard in the bushes before class because if I was walking around school with it, I would get harassed. In the meanwhile, I'm flying to Florida and entering competitions and actually winning money and signing autographs and then coming back to the school hallways. And I was a ghost. Mm hmm. It was a you know, I didn't. I didn't really. I wasn't looking for fanfare or accolades or anything, but but that was a weird paradox to be living in.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Mm hmm. And also, you had this other added element of your dad was sort of like organizing these competitions, which.

00:40:20:00

TONY HAWK:

Oh, yeah. My dad involved himself greatly in skateboarding because there was no organization. Mm hmm. And he saw. He saw these kids who found something that really spoke to them and found a sense of purpose. And there was no sanctioning body. There was no cohesive organization putting on



events or getting them together. And so he took it upon himself to start a series. At the time, those were the events he wanted to go to. But because he was my dad, because he was part of organizing it, I got a lot of I got a lot of heat. I got a lot of. You know, claims of not nepotism, but definitely favoritism.

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ARI FISHMAN:

It seemed like your dad had like a certain determination in him to, like, not say push you to succeed, but to give you the best chances of succeeding.

00:41:10:00

TONY HAWK:

I don't think that my dad thought that putting on those events was giving me a chance to succeed. We still were in a time of skateboarding, was not. It just wasn't financially viable. Mm hmm. These events were awesome. And it was a gathering. And sure, there was some prize money, but it wasn't significant. So I think he just saw that. He wanted to support this thing that I loved. He wanted to support it in a more general sense. Definitely wanted to see me. Yes. Succeed, but more that just feel welcomed and feel included and feel like I was I was part of something that that's valid. But it got weird. I mean, you know, at some point I tried to really distance myself from my my dad, who was always around at these events and and just kind of do my thing, go to my practice sessions and and be gone in the meanwhile.

00:42:10:00

ARI FISHMAN:



Mm hmm. Yeah. I mean, it's hard at that age, just not having the success, just being that age and having your dad there. And then you talked about this a little bit earlier. At this time, like competition is a big and the big rivalry with you and Christian. So can you talk just a little bit like your style versus his style and like where that kind of rival rivalry came from?

00:42:34:00

TONY HAWK:

Well, Christian also and I were were the top competitors through the men late 80s. And we had very different styles. His style was more like surfing, very smooth. A lot of big aerials. Like if he did, if he didn't make twist, it was way high and flipped all the way over. And if I did my twist, it was a little lower and it was a flat spin and it didn't look as as beautiful or as as smooth. But I had all these other tricks. I had board variations I could do. I could spend my board 360, I could do 540 while spinning my board, 360 I could I had all these different, well, circus tricks. That's what they called him. And so people were very divided over who they liked. And it was it was almost like you were defined by are you a fan of Christian or are you a fan of Tony? Which was strange because I was friends with Christian. Like we really enjoyed our time skating together and competing together. But of course, you know, we wanted to succeed. And there was always there was always not controversy, but there was always some. Criticism of who won. Why? You know what I mean? If you watched a finals in one of those years, say, from 86 to 89, there was definitely. But however you see it or your interest level is you'd be like, what that Christian one or obviously Tony should one. It's subjective. Like we're judging art against art. I was just happy to be there, you know?

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ARI FISHMAN:

Sure. I just want to talk a little bit about skateboard design. Talk a little bit like where those ideas came from. A lot of them feel like heavy metal covers, like albums and that sort of thing. Like early on, maybe just talk about like, design and how that evolution traveled.

00:44:33:00

TONY HAWK:

Well, the early skate graphic designs and directions, a lot of it was was skulls. And it was more because it was it was. How do I explain it? I mean, it was it was not that was shocking, but it was iconic. And that all started because Bones was originally a wheel and they were white and they were sort of bone white. And that's why they were called bones. And then there was a skater. His nickname was Bones Ray Bones Rodriguez. And so he had the very first graphic that was a skull because he was nicknamed Bones. And then that became the starting point in the esthetic for the Bones Brigade. So after that, we all had skulls. You know, that was it. Like that's how it started. And they have a great artist. And he would give us his ideas and then we would lean into it because people really liked it. I thought it was cool and mine was a hawk, obviously. And, you know, McGill had a snake and cat had a dragon and it was all just very cool.

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ARI FISHMAN:



Mm hmm. And there was like different esthetics, like Alva posse seemed like bikers or, you know, they were loved by.

00:45:46:00

TONY HAWK:

Everyone had their everyone kind of had a theme and an esthetic to their team. So, yeah, they had the Alva crew with the leather jackets and look more like a gang than a team. It was, you know, Santa Cruz was more like punkers and. But but we all we would all come together and enjoy skating with each other. So as much as it felt segregated or it felt like it was there, were there competitive? We loved getting together and feeding off each other.

00:46:24:00

ARI FISHMAN:

And do you think a lot of those designs, like influenced modern design, like the way Apple markets and stuff?

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TONY HAWK:

I see. I see skateboarding is as sort of influencing and permeating all kinds of culture and marketing. I mean, how many places have you seen where there are skateboards on the wall as art? It just shows how far we've come. Like how and how much interest and how much reverence there is for skateboarding and skateboard artwork.

00:46:56:00



ARI FISHMAN:

And and so after this, you kind of decided to start a business. Like, how did you like what inspired a transition into like being like entrepreneur while you're also being a pro skater? Like at that same time, Well.

00:47:09:00

TONY HAWK:

I started a company in 1992 because I thought my my years and my days of being a pro skater were coming to an end because I was I was 24 and I was a vert skater. And so I was considered old and I was doing an outdated discipline. So I wanted to be in the skateboard world because I loved it so much. And I just decided, you know what? I have a good eye for talent. I feel like I could create a team and an esthetic and do my own thing much in the way that Stacy Peralta did his own thing. I mean, that is literally Stacy. He quit being a pro skater. He formed a team and an esthetic and a direction, and that was the Bones Brigade. I was I did that for ten years. I was on the team. And then when I thought that my career was starting to fade, I wanted to do the same thing. And so I started Birdhouse. It was risky because skateboarding was at a lull in popularity. Very few, very few people were buying skateboards. There were very few skate shops, even fewer skate parks. And I didn't care. I was just I was just happy to still be in the mix and be in the industry. And so Birdhouse is now on are going on 30 plus years. And I never quit skating and I managed to. I managed to stay competitive and still have a career. So I was living the dream. I still am.

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ARI FISHMAN:

At that time. Like computers are kind of like a new thing and coming up and I know, like you've talked a little bit about playing the violin when you're younger, but you kind of gave it up. And I heard the grapevine that like, maybe you're making music like on a Commodore or something like that.

00:48:57:00

TONY HAWK:

Oh yeah. I learned I learned how to use computers early on. So I was I was editing videos with my computer. As I was making music with them. I was, you know, I was one of the first ones to have email to be on the web. I, I was I think I was the first skater to book my own flights. It's funny because now that is all that's on your phone. But at the time it was very new and very progressive. But I was just always a, you know, I just loved technology through all my years and through. I love technology. When I was a kid and through my formative years, I just couldn't afford it. And then when I kind of finally afford a little bit, I made the most of it.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Curious what kind of music you were making?

00:49:42:00

TONY HAWK:





I was cheesy. I mean, it was it was like the early days of what would become Garage Band, where you just have sounds and you're sort of peace. It was more like math rock and yeah.

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ARI FISHMAN:

Crazy beats like repetitive beats?

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TONY HAWK:

Yeah.

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ARI FISHMAN:

You talked about earlier also, but like then street skating kind of became a thing and you kind of like disappeared a little bit from the scene like when that first started. But you also talked about you tried streets getting a little bit.

00:50:06:00

TONY HAWK:

And I well, as I started Birdhouse, I was trying to. I was trying to to boost the brand as much as I could. And through doing so, I was doing all the videos, I was doing all the marketing, all the advertising team management, planning tours and things like that. So that kind of put me behind the scenes. But all along I was skating and I would join in when we would go out in the streets



and hit the rails and hop fences and things. So through those years, I was still skating and I was in the videos doing all that stuff. It just wasn't really the most impressive. It wasn't the most impressive form of that type of skating. But I loved doing it. And at some point I went through some pretty bad ankle injuries because of what I was doing out on the streets and hitting rails and rolling my ankles. And I realized that if I want to continue to do this, especially if I want to continue to do this at a relevant at a relevant level, I've got to go back to skating ramps because that's where those are my strengths. That's where I'm more comfortable. And honestly, it's safer for me. It's way safer for me to ride a 14 foot half pipe than it is for me to jump down for stairs. That's just the truth.

00:51:22:00

ARI FISHMAN:

Why do you think that is?

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TONY HAWK:

Because I have learned that style of skating is ingrained in me. And I know how to fall.

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ARI FISHMAN:

And then just talking about skateboarding in the 90s, like it became a little bit more like cross culture as Asian, like it was very white male kind of before that, more black kids were getting involved in skating and more women were



getting involved in skating. I wonder if you could talk to like just watching that kind of change happen.

00:51:45:00

TONY HAWK:

Yeah, well, the 90s was the the, the revolution of street culture and skateboarding was right along with that, with hip hop and with being considered cool. I mean, that's kind of when skating truly became underground and cool in the eyes of. Corporate America in the eyes of younger kids. And there were so many there were so many boundaries that were being broken in terms of who skates. And you saw more black skaters. You saw more women getting into skating. And it was like, oh, welcome, let's go. Like we're this is this is not just some elitist sport. This is everyone. And if you look now, it's. It's one of the most diverse things you could possibly do.

00:52:34:00

ARI FISHMAN:

Let's just quickly talk about like when things like really kind of blew up in a commercial way. And I think maybe the X-Games was a big turning point for that. I mean, because yeah.

00:52:42:00

TONY HAWK:

I think that once the X-Games found its rhythm in the years like 97, 99, kids were taking a great interest in skating and even even people that don't skate were starting to appreciate it more. And so things got a little bigger. There



were more opportunities for us as pros. There was a commercialization in a sense of skating where it's suddenly you saw it. You saw it in movies, you saw it in commercials. You you saw it in print, in print ads. And you saw some of us as pros being asked to do endorsements. And, hey, we've been doing it most of our lives. And no one ever really considered paying us to endorse anything except endemic skate brands. So for us, it was it was wild. It was exciting. But at some point it was hard to maintain that authenticity through all those all those successes and opportunities. And to be honest, I got a little caught up in some of it and did some. Some promotions that that I was not that excited about that were mostly regrettable. I mean, it wasn't that I was tainting skateboarding or diminishing skateboarding, but it just it didn't really fit. And when I got the chance to work on a video game, I made sure that in my contract I had final approval over anything in terms of the skating, in terms of the music, in terms of the look, the skaters, how I'm represented, how skateboarding represented. And there was a lot to fight for. Like I was not in a position to be making those demands. But I'm thankful that Activision at the time agreed to all that. And when the video game finally came out, it was everything I'd hoped that it could be and more. And I thought it represented skateboarding well. It was authentic, it was hardcore, and it represented all of skateboarding, not just my style or not just me. And the music and the art and the and the the fashion. So once it came out, I was expecting it to be well-received by skaters and maybe inspire skaters to buy a game console or PlayStation. That was, to me, the market success. That was because skateboarding wasn't up. I mean, yes, it was on the rise, but it wasn't that popular. And home video games were just starting to come into play. So there weren't many success stories there. And so we didn't. We didn't have a



lot of expectation, which was awesome because once it came out and then started doing well and getting good reviews, they started talking about a second one. And that one got even better reviews. And so suddenly we had a franchise. And it was wild. It was it changed my life completely.

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ARI FISHMAN:

At the 900, the X-Games. I mean, it's such like an iconic moment in like history. Maybe just talk about like that moment, what that meant to you. And I mean, obviously in that moment, there was so much determination. It felt like something so much bigger than landing a trick that maybe it was just landing the trick for you. But can you just talk about like.

00:56:18:00

TONY HAWK:

Yeah, well, 900 is that is obviously a trick I'm known for and it's a two and a half spin in the air. I started trying it in 1987 on a ramp in France that I was I was skating because we were there for a summer camp for five weeks. It was a miserable failure of an attempt. But but I had the idea because I had been doing seven times pretty regularly by that point. And I started trying and actively a few years later, once the ramps got better and I had more confidence with my spinning. And then through the mid-nineties, I would sort of revisit it and I would try it. I would try it pretty I would I would be very determined to make it every time. And then when I finally started to try to land them, I got hurt a couple of times. And so then I would back off and sometimes come back to it for a bit, get hurt, back off. But I did have at some



point I had all the pieces to it. I just knew that it was going to take some great motivator to to really make this happen because I've already tried to make it on video. I've actually built a ramp with the specs to make it and didn't succeed. And so. I. It was weird, I say that that I wanted a great motivator, but in all honesty, I was kind of done with it because I tried it like I gave it everything I had and I broke my rib because I was leaning too far forward when I landed. I mean, like I landed my skateboard on the ramp and then just fell into the flat bottom. And I was like, I guess that's it. I can't do it. And then when the X-Games came around, they had a best track event in 1999, which was kind of just an afterthought. Best track event back then was just sort of a sideshow. And it's 20 minutes of of some of the top skaters bailing missing tricks and then maybe 2 or 3 make something and they get the medals and that's it. And we move on. And we had we had done events like that in the past, and I usually did pretty well. But it just no one really cared. And so in this instance, I had an idea for a trick that I had done once before. It was a very old 722 it's a 720 spin with an extra 180 of the board. I made that once in my life. I made that trick early on in the event, so I still had time to spare. I didn't have anything else planned because I thought that that's going to take me the entire timeframe. And so the announcer was kind of was was kind of poking me is in what about one of those nine hundreds? And I was like, dude, I've given 900 everything I have. And. But why not? Because it's a big crowd. You know, it is a spectacle even when you fall. So I tried a couple and after about my third one, I realized, like, I've got the right amount of speed here, I've got the right amount of spin, maybe I can try to throw down again. And. And if I get hurt, so what? Like, I'm never going to get hurt again. This is the time and place. Not that I wanted to, but I was definitely willing to take it. And



then after about 6 or 7 attempts, I got serious about trying to make it because I started spotting my landing. And that was rare for me to spot my landing. Usually when I was spinning it, it was blind and I was just going on using the force to one two to figure out where the wall is. But this time I was spinning so fast and I could see my landing zone. So I started putting them down. And when I finally committed to one, I fell forward again the way that I had gotten hurt. But I didn't get hurt. And that was probably the moment where I knew I could do it because. When I went back up the ramp to try it again, I shifted my weight to my back foot mid spin, and then I fell backwards. And it was like, split the difference. And I made the next one.

01:00:22:00

ARI FISHMAN:

Mm hmm. And when we were going through those repetitions, did you know, like, at some point, I'm going to make this happen today?

01:00:27:00

TONY HAWK:

I knew I was going to make it happen or I was going to get severely injured. Because it wasn't going to be me quitting, I guess. I know. I'm not saying like, I was definitely going to, you know, kill myself doing it. No, I knew that I was going to get hurt enough that it wasn't going to allow me to try again. Exhaustion was not going to be the exit.

01:00:47:00

ARI FISHMAN:

Got it.

01:00:49:00

TONY HAWK:

That's it.

01:00:50:00

ARI FISHMAN:

Yeah. It's amazing. It really is an amazing moment. Just talk about the future of skateboarding. And do you think there are still, like, boundaries that can be broken? You know, so much has been gained in the past 30 years.

01:01:00:00

TONY HAWK:

Like the sky's the limit for skateboarding. It keeps evolving and the tricks keep getting invented and boundaries. Perceived limits keep getting broken. Yeah, I mean, I've been I've been skateboarding for 45 years and I have seen it evolve constantly. And now we are in an era of skating where it's much more accessible. It's much more international. Kids are starting earlier. Let's put it this way. I just saw a girl do a kickflip 540 on a vert ramp and she's ten years old. I. I didn't invent that trick until I was 26. And I have been skating for six years. She's doing it at the age that I started skating. As a foundational track to build upon. That's how far we are. That's how far we've come.

01:01:44:00

ARI FISHMAN:





Amazing. And if you have time, if you could talk about just like your foundations and kind of like how you give back to the communities and so on.

01:02:06:00

TONY HAWK:

Oh, sure. Well, I because the skate park was my place that I felt like. But I found my my sense of community. I found my sense of purpose. I found my my tribe, my calling, not just to be pro, but really a sense of belonging. That's where I belonged. That when I had some sense of success, the best that I could do to get back to skateboarding is to provide more skate park facilities. So we have the skate park project. We have been we have been running it for over. Well, let's see. Sorry. So we've been running it off for over 20 years and we've helped to fund and build over 800 skate parks in that time. And it's definitely the proudest work that I do. And and you can get involved on the the most basic level in your community by advocating for a skate park. And we will give you the roadmap to trying to get one in your area. And hey, also, selfishly, I get more places escape.

01:03:18:00

ARI FISHMAN:

Just one follow up question. If you could just talk a little bit about like your family, because I know at some point, like family became more important priority to you. You've talked about in the past and you just talk about how that sort of shifted for you and.

01:03:31:00



TONY HAWK:

Oh, yeah. Well, through my years of wild success that I never really dreamed of, I got a little caught up in it and I was chasing every opportunity. I was traveling a lot and not present for my family. And at some point I realized my priorities need to shift. And I definitely learned to say no to a lot of requests in terms of financial or otherwise. That would just take up my time and monopolize my mindset. And so I would say about ten years ago I made a very concerted effort to just be more available to my kids. And my relationships have blossomed since then with my family and my wife and I have this really great relationship and it's like I never imagined I could have the best of both worlds. I thought that naively, that I had to commit myself fully to skateboarding to make that successful. And I don't. And the happiness is exponential now.

END TC: 01:04:39:00